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Pavak

Jonaraja Institute of
Genocide & Attrocities Studies

DEMYSTIFYING LAL DED

अपथ्याशीवबालःसामन्तसहितस्ततः।
जनानाम जातिविध्वंसे सूहभट्टः कृतोद्यमः।

- Pandit Jonaraja, Father of Genocide Studies

Pandit Jonaraja, the author of second Rajtarangini that follows the Rajtarangini of Kalhan, was a Kashmiri Shaivite Bhatta Brahmin. His real name was Jyotsanakar, meaning the creator of moonlight. This poetic name was true to his being. He was an exceptional and sensitive poet, well versed in history, astrology, Ayurveda, Yoga and subtler aspects of all these disciplines. He was a renowned Sanskrit scholar. His year of birth as per the records available is estimated as 1389-90.

Like Kalhan he has written the history of Kashmir in poetry. That is not all there is about him. He has recorded the genocide of Kashmiri Pandits in detail and delineated its aspects like the present day genocide scholars.

Jati Vidhwans—this is the word Jonaraja has coined to describe genocide. He has defined genocide and his definition almost mirrors the definition given by Raphael Lemkin. He has even pointed out the special intent that motivates the perpetrator and given a very sensitive and vivid account of how an ideology radicalises a regime and effects a total change in its mode of operation that leads to genocide. He has made it clear that the mind of a perpetrator is at a very low level of maturity. That is the view held by present day genocide scholars also. He has defined genocide and his definition is almost equal to the definition given by Raphael Lemkin. His account of the first exodus of Kashmiri Pandits, if placed in correct context, is no different from the atrocities the community faced in 1990.

Roots of the field of genocide studies are found in Pandit Jonaraja. He in every sense is "**Father of Genocide Studies**."

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Why is it important to demystify Lalded?

Lal Ded expressed her spiritual insights and teachings through her poetry. Her verses, known as "vakh," are deeply philosophical and often employ metaphorical language.

Sunanda Vashisht
Editor-in-Chief, Pavak

Lal Ded, also known as Lalded or Lalleshwari, was a 14th-century Kashmiri saint and poetess. Lalded has remained a guiding light of consciousness of every Kashmiri Pandit for last hundreds of years. What is it that made Lalded survive in the minds and hearts of people. In this edition of Pavak we set out to understand what makes Lalded immortal and what made her survive in hearts and minds of people century after century?

Lalded by most accounts lived for about 40 years. A child bride she was sent off to her husband's home at a very young age. Facing rejection and abuse from her mother-in-law, Lalded finally left her home and for rest of the years wandered from place to place reciting her poetry and sharing her spiritual moments. Lalded wrote nothing, she attracted no followers who would then follow her wherever she went, she had no great concern for legacy, then what is it that kept her alive?

Up until now the entire Lalded scholarship has been to further her stature as a mystic saint and as a Shaivite philosopher. No attempt was done to place Lal ded in her historical context and then analyze her life and work. She was decontextualized in our understanding. Renowned Genocide studies scholar, Dr. Dilip Kaul says poignantly “Mother Lalded was made inaccessible to us – her metaphorical childred” . Lalded thus has a unique distinction of never having been forgotten but at the same time so cruelly decontextualized that I call it a 'crime against Lalded'. How can a person be understood without understanding the life and time she lived in?

When we analyze life and times of Lalded we find that her writing serves as a lightning rod of resistance literature in Kashmir. This makes her one of the earliest and most significant resistance heroes of our time. It is this realization that made us at Pavak sit up and we decided to dedicate an issue to demystifying Lalded. Lalded had survived vagaries of time because she instilled in us the desire to fight for our identity and stand strong against invading cultures.

Lal Ded's life, teachings, and poetry exemplify female resistance by challenging social norms, advocating for gender equality, and promoting spiritual liberation and nonconformity. Her enduring legacy continues to inspire people seeking to break free from societal constraints and pursue their own paths of self-discovery and resistance.

Islam had already arrived in Kashmir during Lal Ded's time Islam brought with itself patriarchy that was a sharp departure from matriarchal society that pre–Islamic Kashmir was. Lal Ded roamed around in a society marked by strong patriarchal norms and oppressive social hierarchies. Despite this, she defied conventional gender roles and societal expectations by choosing to live an ascetic and spiritually-focused life. She rejected the traditional path of marriage and family life that was expected of women in her time.

Lal Ded's poetry and teachings emphasized the importance of a direct and personal relationship with the Divine, which directly challenged the Abrahamic notion of divine. This emphasis on individual spiritual experience and inner transformation challenged the authority of the male-dominated religious institutions of her era.

Lal Ded expressed her spiritual insights and teachings through her poetry. Her verses, known as "vakh," are deeply philosophical and often employ metaphorical language. By using poetry, she conveyed her spiritual messages to a wide audience, including those who might not have had access to formal education. Her verses continue to inspire and empower people, particularly women, to this day. Lal Ded's poetry often centered on themes of liberation, freedom from societal constraints, and the pursuit of inner truth. Her writings encouraged people, especially women, to seek independence and liberation from societal norms and constraints. It is important to note that in all her verses, Lal ded is addressing “battas' or Kashmiri pandits. There is no instance where she has addressed people of any other faith.

Lal Ded must be celebrated as a figure of female resistance and original hero of Kashmiri Pandit resistance against genocide because of her fearless pursuit of a spiritual path, her rejection of traditional gender roles, and her use of poetry to convey messages of empowerment, freedom, and inner transformation. Her life and teachings continue to inspire individuals, especially women, to challenge societal norms and seek spiritual independence and self-realization.

In this edition of Pavak, you will find Lalded revisited from an entirely new lens of hero for genocide victim community of Kashmir Pandits. Dr. Dilip Kaul and Sh. Tito Ganju delve into the totally uncharted territories and resurrect Lalded for us to discover all over again. You will also find a moving account of a young cinematographer, Nitin Dhar who visited Kashmir to film a documentary on Lalded and found himself on a completely new journey of self-realization.

We hope you will enjoy this edition as much as you enjoyed our previous editions. As always, we look forward to your feedback.

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Lalded: A symbol of Resilience and Matriarchal Heritage in the Tapestry of Kashmir's history

Kashmir's history, much like its landscape, is characterized by both splendor and strife. The land that has witnessed the rise and fall of empires has also borne witness to periods of immense suffering and displacement. Within this narrative, Lalded's journey emerges as a beacon of hope, defying the forces that seek to erase the cultural memory of a people.

Tito Ganju
Chairman, JIGAS

In the pages of history, there are chapters stained with the horror of genocide, a bleak reminder of humanity's capacity for cruelty. Within this somber framework, the story of Kashmir stands as a complex narrative, woven with the threads of resilience, cultural identity, and the echoes of a matriarchal society that persists against the odds. At the center of this intricate tapestry is Lalded, a symbol of unwavering strength and a testament to the indomitable human spirit that survives even the darkest of times.

Kashmir's history, much like its landscape, is characterized by both splendor and strife. The land that has witnessed the rise and fall of empires has also borne witness to periods of immense suffering and displacement. Within this narrative, Lalded's journey emerges as a beacon of hope, defying the forces that seek to erase the cultural memory of a people. As we approach her story through the lens of genocide studies, we see her as a figure who resists, persists, and personifies the human yearning for continuity.

In a region marked by violence and upheaval, Lalded's spiritual journey speaks to a form of resistance that transcends physical boundaries. Her connection to the teachings of Kashmir Shaivism is a testament to the enduring power of cultural heritage in the face of attempts at erasure. Lalded's quest for enlightenment was not just an individual pursuit; it was an act of defiance against the forces that sought to strip away the identity and memory of a people.

At the heart of Lalded's story lies the recognition of Kashmir's matriarchal roots, a societal structure often overshadowed by the shadows of conflict. In a society where women held integral roles in shaping both domestic and communal life, Lalded's presence becomes a reminder that women's influence transcends generations and adversities. Her resilience was not only a reflection of her personal strength, but also an embodiment of the enduring spirit of the matriarchal heritage that defined Hindu Kashmir.

Even as the tides of time have shifted, the matriarchal essence of Hindu Kashmir remains a steadfast cornerstone of its identity. Women, the custodians of culture and tradition, continue to wield influence within their families and communities, ensuring the preservation of values and resilience in the face of adversity. Lalded's legacy is interwoven with the stories of countless women who have navigated the complexities of history, nurturing a cultural continuity that defies attempts to erase their existence.

In the valleys of Kashmir, where the echoes of Lalded's wisdom still reverberate and the scars of history are etched into the landscape, her story stands as a testament to the human spirit's unyielding determination. As we navigate the intricacies of genocide studies and examine the interplay of historical narratives, Lalded's narrative reminds us that even amidst the darkest of chapters, the light of human resilience and cultural endurance continues to shine. In a world haunted by the ghosts of genocidal atrocities, Lalded's legacy is a testament to the power of memory, identity, and the unwavering strength that lies within a people united by their history, culture, and shared experiences.

Lalded: The Heroic Resistance to Genocidal assault

Lal Ded addresses the divinity saying that you are the sky and you are the earth, you are the day, wind and the night. You are the flowers, water, sandalwood and grains of rice you are everything so what shall I offer you in worship! This is the ultimate non-dualistic approach that visualizes everything as the expression of one divinity. The ecosystem does not need any messenger, the ultimate divinity pulsates in every part of the creation and the balance persists.

Dr. Dileep Kumar Kaul
Director, JIGAS

S.T. Allison and G.R. Goethals in their concept of "Heroic Leadership Dynamic" have placed the idea of heroes/ heroines in a socio psychological perspective. They say that the narratives about heroes provide us with many psychological benefits. They can fulfil cognitive and emotional needs by providing wisdom, meaning, hope, inspiration and growth. Lalded is a brilliant "Heroic Leadership Dynamic" who has played a great part in providing the survival narrative of Kashmiri Pandits amid Jihadi genocidal assaults. She, through her poetry has protecting the traditions and the images of her community. Anthony Smith in his very popular book , "The Ethnic origins of Nations" has very aptly interpreted Heroes as history because the Heroes, like the History preserve the virtues of the community to which they belong.

Lalded has done exactly that. She has tried to press upon her community to preserve the virtues they were fast losing under the influence of the machinations of Muslim proselytizers. Her time was the time of cultural genocide that was being perpetrated by Shahmir. Conspiracies to eradicate the traditional virtues of Kashmir were being hatched. Under such socio-cultural conditions, her poetry written in four lined verses called "Vakhs" came as a heroic action, When the invading ideologies were propagating their concept of "One divinity with one worldly messenger" Lalded came up with her ecological wisdom of everything being the expression of an all-pervading divinity which makes everything depend on everything else:

Ga'gan tsey bhu'tal tsey,
Tsey dyen pa'van te raat
A'reg Tsan'dun posh poe'ne tsey
Sa'kal tsey te lae'gzi kyah.

She addresses the divinity saying that you are the sky and you are the earth, you are the day, wind and the night. You are the flowers, water, sandalwood and grains of rice you are everything so what shall I offer you in worship! This is the ultimate non-dualistic approach that visualizes everything as the expression of one divinity. The ecosystem does not need any messenger, the ultimate divinity pulsates in every part of the creation and the balance persists. This vaakh is in direct contrast with the invading Islamic thought of divinity that is outside the human sphere and sends a messenger in the human form to give his message. In this way Lalded's poetry is a tool of resistance to the cultural genocide that Kashmiri Pandits were being subjected to in Lalded's times.

Continuing with her heroic counternarrative of the invading Islamic ideology, Lalded asserts those identities that are rooted in place that is Kashmir and tells in unequivocal terms that the invading identity has not the power to grant salvation to humans. She gives a list of salvation granting identities from which the invading ideology is excluded:

Shiv' waa Keshav'waa Zin waa
Kamlaj'nath naam darin yuh
Mai abli kais'tan bhave'roz
Su'waa su'waa su'waa su.

Shiva, Keshava, Buddha which she refers to as Zin, or Narayana who is lotus born all are one and the same when it comes to getting rid of the ailments of life. Any of these can enable powerless earthly beings to attain salvation.

This verse excludes the ideology that Shahmir and his ilk were propagating. This is a clear message to the invader that his ideology carried no weight in front of the rich tradition of spirituality that formed the place-identity of Kashmir. Though Lalded did not name what was bad, but the conspicuous absence of the invading ideology from her poetry defines what needs to be included and what needs to be excluded from the society. That is what establishes her as a heroine. Muslims invaders were trying to snatch power. Their definitions of good and bad were beginning to dominate. With this shifting concept of good and bad in that society, Lalded's poetry came as a heroic action that intersected with this shifting context of good and bad. Lalded, like any great hero, had in her morality and values of her times which despite the antagonistic powers she aimed at preserving.

What are values? Values teach us the ways in which social activities are to be done. Values guide us through various social situations and provide us with the standards with which we can analyse actions and their results. They enable us to understand others and our own selves. Lalded's time was witness to changing values. The invaders had come with an ideology that detested idolatry. The idol worshippers were labelled as " Kafirs." Kafir is an identity given by Muslims to idol-worshippers. When this word is repeated many times in the dominant community it spreads to each member of the perpetrator and the victim community. Till the invaders came, this was not the case. Repetition of detesting remarks intensifies the detestation and turns the word "Kafir" into an identity trap. The victim is always aware of the definition of his identity contained in the word "Kafir." Kafir is characterized by his idolatrous actions. He continues to go to temples and under the social squeeze created by the invaders he forgets the fact that it is actually transcending the shapes of the idols within him that may lead him to spiritual and every kind of development. Lalded provides Kashmiris with such wisdom:

Dee'va va'tta dee'vur va'tta
Pey'thha bwo'na chuy eka'vaath
Pooz kas ka'rakh hoott ba'tta
Kar ma'nas te pava'nas sangaatth.

This vaakh is a bright example of environmental wisdom and its intersection with genocidal environment that was being created. Let us analyse the elements contained in the Vaakh point by point:

1. God is in stone.
2. The temple in which this God has been placed is in stone.
3. Everything in the temple from top to bottom is in stone.
4. Lalded addressed batta, the Kashmiri Pandit as a stagnant rigid Pandit who has not come out of the confines of the rigidity of the stone structures.
5. He just worships stone idols placed between stone walls and does not attempt to transcend them.
6. Lalded presses upon batta to unite his breath with his mind, that means control the mind with pranayama.

The question is why did Lalded need to suggest Pranayama to her community? This clearly implies that they were not doing subtle practices like Pranayama and indulged in gross practices like visiting temples. The reason was nothing but the social stress created by Muslims proselytizers who were gaining power. The dominant batta community of Kashmir was slowly being turned into a victim community. It is under such situations that the perceptive sphere of the victim community begins to lessen. It turns from subtle to gross. It is here that the crisis of imagination occurs. That is why the

cultural practices turn from subtle to gross.

Through this vaakh, Lalded attempts to expand the sphere of awareness of the batta community. The genocidal environment that was being created had already foreshortened the environmental perception of the community. Why did Lalded suggest Pranayama? Pranayama is conscious breathing. Our general breathing is unconscious and involuntary. Pranayama is the very basic exercise that must be understood through the phenomenon of Trika, the basic definition of which in Kashmir Shaivism is the unity of Ichcha (desire), jnana (knowledge) and Kriya (action). Pranayama is the very basic action that takes us from unaware breathing to aware breathing. We become aware of our very basic life force. This counters the foreshortening of environmental perception. We desire to breathe consciously and then do the action. And what is the knowledge we get from it. We become conscious of the envelop of air around the earth, the air that is taken in by all living beings. We become aware that we are not special but just a part of the creation of all pervading divinity. It makes the environmental conscious so spiritual. This expands the sphere of awareness and narrative sphere also. Through just the practice or Pranayama Lalded imparts the basic awareness of Trika identity that was the basic identity of Kashmir aiming at the unity of desire, action and knowledge. This is the resistance identity that stands against the perpetrators of genocide till date.

Lalded is the community heroine of the Kashmiri Pandit victims of genocide that occurred in Kashmir. Her one Vaakh has been quoted innumerable times by almost every Kashmiri Pandit post-1990 genocide:

Aa'mi pane soud'ras naa'vi chaes la'maan,
Kati bo'zei dai myon mae'ti diyi taar
Aa'main ta'kain poeni zan sha'maan
Zuv chum bra'man ga're gat'tse haa.

This vaakh represents the very basic state of the spiritual journey of Lalded. She admits that she is trying to pull her boat through the ocean of existence with an untwisted slender thread. This shows that her tools are not yet matured. She seeks the grace of God to pull through the journey. This means that God is not yet "Shiva". It is dai, the general expression for God in Kashmiri language. She is on the path of spiritualism but not yet on the path of Shaivism otherwise she would have used the "Shiv" in place of "dai" and that would not have affected the meter of the verse. She had to leave her home due to her evil in-laws and had not forgotten her longing for her home, otherwise she would not have used this metaphor to express her longing for her ultimate home, the abode of the ultimate lord. Her personal pain of separation from her worldly home became the expression for the longing for the ultimate home, the abode of the ultimate lord. She has not yet transcended her victimhood of familial atrocities. This victimhood turns into her longing to reach the ultimate divine abode which after many centuries becomes the expression of the collective victimhood of a community subjected to genocide. This is perhaps the only example where the expression of the personal victimhood of familial atrocities became the expression for the spiritual longing and then after many centuries it became the expression of the loss of home of the victims of genocide in Kashmir. The line "Zuv chum bra'man ga're gat'tse haa (my heart craves for my home)" is comparable with "L'Shana Haba'ah B'Yerushalayim" the Hebrew prayer sung by Jews at the end of Passover Sedar.

Lalded, the epitome of hope and self-esteem for Kashmiri Pandits, the victims of Genocide in Kashmir, is a rare example of a community heroine of victims of Genocide, whom the perpetrator community has constantly tried to appropriate. As Lalded gives hope to the victim community and inspires it for growth, the perpetrator community has made attempts to dilute the Shaivite identity that is reflected all over her poetry. One of the most popular interpolated verses attributed to her is:

Shiv chhuy thali thali ro'zaan
Mow zaan heund te musalmaan
Truk-ai chhuk te pa'nun paan par'zaan
soi chai sahibas zae'ney zaan.

(Shiva exists everywhere, in everything. Why discriminate between Hindus and Muslims. If you are a Trika, recognize your real self and you will achieve the 'Sahib' the ultimate lord.)

The verse raises many doubts. If Shiva exists everywhere, why end the verse with the word "Sahib" which is a non-Shaivite, non-Hindu identity marker? Lalded's verse given in the beginning of this note says that earth, day, night, wind, flowers, water, sandalwood, grains of rice, all are Shiva so what could be offered in worship to him? This is ultimate non-dualism and in the verse given above there is utter dualism, distinction between Hindu and Muslim, two identity tags, that the verse tells to avoid. Why should a person who has a very reasonable ecologically oriented, non-dualistic world view go for utter dualistic worldview of distinction between Hindu and Muslim which should be avoided? The verse sounds like poetic reference taken from a lecture delivered by some Indian leader at a political rally. This is aimed at diluting the non-dualistic Shaivite identity of Lalded that grants a sense of ages old continuity to Kashmiri Pandit victims of genocide in Kashmir.

Thus Lalded is not only a community heroine of Kashmiri Pandit victims of Genocide but also a continuing seat of narrative conflict between the victim and the perpetrator. Still the perpetrator community in Kashmir is trying to create a narrative that it is not clear whether Lalded was a Hindu or a Muslim. The strategy is simple. If you cannot appropriate her create doubts about her identity so that the victim community does not get any support for their dented self from the community heroine. This is a unique example of perpetrator mindset.

Anthony Smith in his very popular book , "The Ethnic origins of Nations" has very aptly interpreted Heroes as history because the Heroes, like the History preserve the virtues of the community to which they belong. Lalded is true history of Kashmiri Pandit victims of genocide. She not only preserves their virtues in her being, but also the conscious of their place which is Kashmir.

admits that she is trying to pull her boat through the ocean of existence with an untwisted slender thread. This shows that her tools are not yet matured. She seeks the grace of God to pull through the journey. This means that God is not yet "Shiva". It is dai, the general expression for God in Kashmiri language. She is on the path of spiritualism but not yet on the path of Shaivism otherwise she would have used the "Shiv" in place of "dai" and that would not have affected the meter of the verse. She had to leave her home due to her evil in-laws and had not forgotten her longing for her home, otherwise she would not have used this metaphor to express her longing for her ultimate home, the abode of the ultimate lord. Her personal pain of separation from her worldly home became the expression for the longing for the ultimate home, the abode of the ultimate lord.

In Kashmir, With Lal Ded

Nitin Dhar
Cinematographer
JIGAS Alumni

"How unfair is it? I have never shot here in Kashmir. God knows when I will. It would be such an ecstatic day for me". With these thoughts in my heart, I left from Kashmir to Jammu on the 25th of July after a visit for Amarnath yatra. Who knew I was going to be back in just a little more than a month to shoot a documentary that we at Jonaraja Institute were making about Mata Lalleshwari / Lal Ded and her Vaakhs. It cannot even be a coincidence that the former trip was for Shiva and the latter for the great Shaiv Yogini and the first poetess of Kashmiri language, Mata Lal Ded.

Lal Ded chose her team herself. I was in Jammu for two weeks after my Amarnath Yatra. It was the first week of August when I received a phone call from Tito Sir (Tito Ganju, Chairman - JIGAS), informing me about this event that is being conceived to be held on the 23rd of September to celebrate Lal Ded Jayanti (birth anniversary of Lal Ded). In the following days, an idea to make a documentary on Lal Ded was conceived. Dileep Ji (Dr Dileep Kaul, our director at JIGAS) was writing the script with Tito Sir putting all ideas together to give the film a proper shape. Meanwhile it was decided that a total number of 5 Lal-Vakhs (verses of Lal Ded) would be the focus and the threat that would knit the narrative together. Didi (Sunanda Vashisht, our Chief Academic Council) was coordinating with eminent singer Kailash Mehra Sadhu for composing and singing the Vaakhs which formed the foundation of the documentary. The title of the documentary 'Demystifying Lal Ded' explains it the best. With this documentary we wanted to explore the Vakhs of Lal Ded through sociological interpretations and applications that are relevant to even contemporary times.

This universality of Lal Ded that even transcends her time is the central theme of this documentary. While the script and the music parts were being worked upon, I had already moved to Mumbai where I am currently based for my filmmaking profession. Things started falling in place one after another. As we were looking for the narrator for the documentary, I was reminded of Chand Dhar, a senior actor tuned voice over artist. About a week to ten days from there, we found ourselves shooting the narration of the documentary in a personal library of Chand Ji Raina, again a Kashmiri Pandit living in Mumbai. Till about a day prior we were struggling to get a library because it was Sunday and then I had to immediately fly to Kashmir to shoot visuals for the musical part of the film. I remember it was evening time and if we didn't get a location of our choice then we would have to make do with a plain wall as the background with which we would not have been quite happy. Lal Ded has other plans for us.

I had sent a message to some of the Kashmiri Pandits and other acquaintances in Mumbai asking for a place that looked like a library. But I didn't hear back from anyone till about late evening. Just a minute after I was about to decide on an alternate location for the shoot, I got a message from Chand Ji Raina, one of the people I had messaged. He responded with a picture of his personal home library wall. It worked perfectly for us. "Sir, we have found the location. I am now calling the equipment vendor to confirm the shoot", I called Tito Sir to inform him. We spoke about how Lal Ded herself was getting things done. We could collectively feel this. It could also not be the coincidence that we got a library wall with books on Kashmir Shaivism, the Vedas etc. This experience was so magical that we knew we had nothing to worry about.

I knew Chand Ji Raina and his family who hosted us for the shoot at their house. We had been planning to meet for years. Who knew we would meet like this? Moreover, Chand Dhar, our narrator, was facing the camera for the first time in about eight years after he had decided to retire from acting and do voice over full time. When he told me this, I pointed out the Lal Ded book that we had kept on the table as part of the setting. "Yes, She is the one making us do all this indeed", he said. It was Sunday when we shot the narration. Monday morning I was sitting in a plane to go to Srinagar for the rest of the shoot. I landed in Srinagar late afternoon and the moment I sat in the shuttle that takes passengers to the city, I thought to myself, "Here I am, in Kashmir, for a shoot in Kashmir for Lal Ded; with Lal Ded".

Vanshaj Raina who comes from a family of Kashmiri Pandits who stayed back in 1990 in Kashmir is a budding line producer in Kashmir. I was introduced to him and his work just a few weeks ago. As we decided to shoot in Kashmir, we hired Vanshaj to take care of local resources and technical requirements for our shoot. While I explained the project to him, he said, "We are so distant from all this while living in Kashmir. Now it feels like I am a Kashmiri Pandit and I am talking to my people. I get the sense of belonging to this project and the work you all are doing". By Monday night we theoretically had everything in place and were ready to shoot from the next morning. Since we were just 10 days away from the screening of the film, we had to work at war-footing to make things happen. Hence, we just had one day to shoot in Kashmir. Vanshaj proved to be a great help and Tuesday morning I met him and we began our day with some chai on the roadside outside the popular Durga Nag Temple.

Sindoor that was to be applied to the character of Lal Ded for one of the scenes was still something we were struggling to find.I finally found it in the shop outside

This universality of Lal Ded that even transcends her time is the central theme of this documentary. While the script and the music parts were being worked upon, I had already moved to Mumbai where I am currently based for my filmmaking profession. Things started falling in place one after another. As we were looking for the narrator for the documentary, I was reminded of Chand Dhar, a senior actor tuned voice over artist.

Durga Nag Temple. Then, we headed for the shoot to our first location - Jyeshta Devi Temple popularly known as Zeethyar. Things seemed in control till we realised that our actress who was to play the part of Lal Ded was hosptalised after fainting at her place right before she was to leave for the shoot. It must have been about 10 am when we got the news. Someone from the hospital had picked up the call and given this information to Vanshaj. The whole crew had been waiting at the temple since 7am. I made a phone call to Tito Sir and we were suddenly thrown in a fix. At the same time however, we knew Lal Ded was looking at us and that She would figure something out, so we waited.

After an hour, we got a call from our actress Alia telling us that she was better and on the way for the shoot. We were more than surprised. The moment she reached we paced everything up and started to shoot. The moment we started shooting, it came to my mind to speak with Alia and make her comfortable since we were shooting inside a temple in front of a Shiv Ling and especially in Kashmir. I did not know her before this shoot so I presumed that she might be hesitant to be in this role considering how sensitive Kashmiri society is especially for Muslim women. Just a few seconds later she asked me to not worry and take the shots at ease. “Our family believes in the Pandit rituals and their energy. In fact, we have a family Guru who is a Kashmiri Pandit and resides in Jammu. We visit him to seek his blessings too”. I was stunned. “Lal Ded has chosen you. Despite the difficulties you had in the morning today, it had to be you. You were destined to sit here”, I said. She smiled and replied, “I completely agree”. We shot at Zeethyar and then headed towards a forest area of Tangmarg. In her red traditional Kashmiri Pandit Pheran Lal Ded walks through the woods. Everything including the positioning of the Sun seemed apt. However, we were running short of time so we had to quickly move back towards Srinagar.

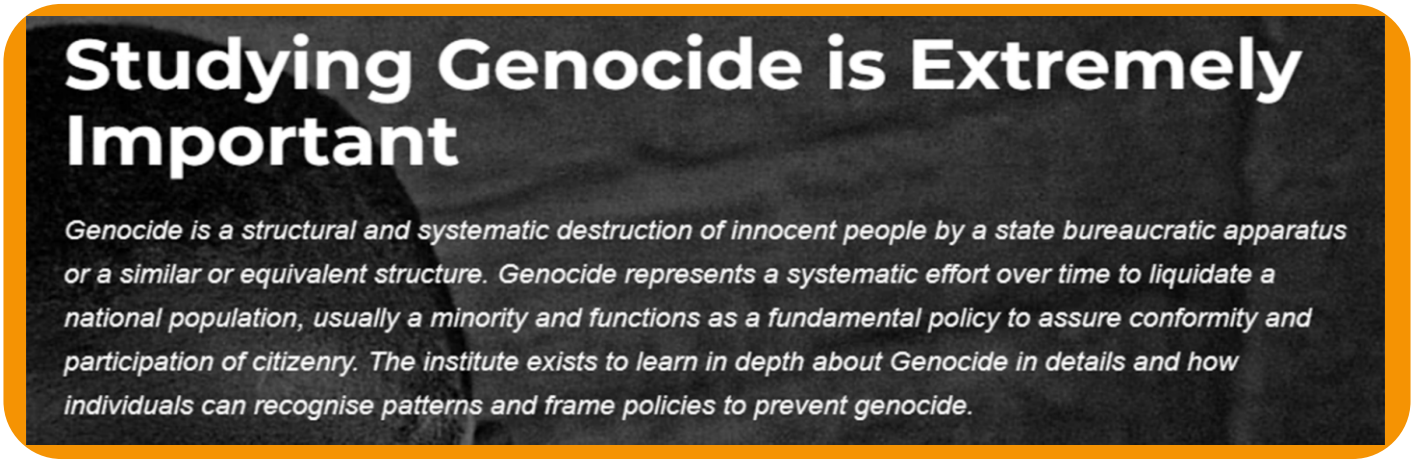
We had planned to go to Tangmarg before shooting at Dal considering the hard sunlight during the afternoon around Dal lake which would not be the best visually and also the fact that the forest area would lose light much before the city in the evening. Unfortunately, we got stuck in traffic and by the time we reached Dal Lake it was pitch dark. The tensions rose as we had to finish the shoot in the same day keeping in mind the time and budget constraints since we had accounted for just one day of shoot. I then personally had a word with Vanshaj, Alia and Arif, our drone operator. I proposed that we would shoot for just two hours the next morning and we would not need the main camera but just the drone and Alia. We planned things sitting along Dal Lake and decided to go by this plan.

The next morning, things went smooth and we got really good shots from the interiors of Dal Lake. A local Shikara woman had to play a part for one of the Vakhs. She was one of a kind. Every direction given to her by me or our coordinators was responded to by the choicest blessings I have heard. It felt like Lal Ded has made this whole journey blissful for her children. We finished our shoot and got all the shots we needed. Arif, our drone operator, had to go to Kokernag for his personal shoot the same day. He had postponed that shoot for us. A day later we found out that there was a major terrorist attack and an encounter taking place in Kokernag not far from where he had to go. He was practically saved by Lal Ded.We had lunch nearby while the data was being transferred to my hard drive. Alia while leaving wished us all well and was telling me more about how their Kashmiri Pandit Guru's blessings have healed her family. I was moved by her story.

While dropping me off at the Tourist Centre Bus Stand, Vanshaj and I had a great conversation about our culture and history. He told me how difficult it is for him and his family to survive in Kashmir in the given conditions. He also told me to keep sharing all the study and audio-visual content related to Kashmiri Pandit culture with him. This really had an impact on me. “Perhaps exile serves a better purpose even in the sense of preservation and expression of one's culture than being in the homeland which is infested with the genocidal environment”, I thought to myself. “I felt the disconnect that Vanshaj felt and also the hope he could see through working on this project and connecting back with his people and culture, through Lal Ded.While boarding the bus to the airport, I put the bus ticket in my wallet - a souvenir from yet another 'visit' to my homeland and softly hummed a Lal Vakhs till I reached the airport. The story didn't end there.

My flight got delayed by an hour and I ended up spending about half an hour at the bookstore at Srinagar airport talking about Lal Ded with the salesman who seemed well read. He had read books on Lal Ded but not the one that was not so 'coincidentally' in my bag. He asked for it and I took it out for him to take a photograph of it. He tried to recite a Vaakh but fumbled and then I completed it

.“Aamipan sadras naavi chaas lamaan,kati Bozi daiy myon meyti diy taar,aamyan taakyan poiyn zann shramaan,zuv chhum bramaan garre gats'haa”.

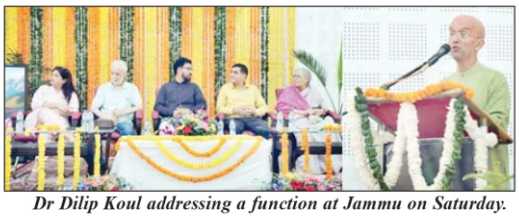

Studying Genocide is Extremely Important
Genocide is a structural and systematic destruction of innocent people by a state bureaucratic apparatus or a similar or equivalent structure. Genocide represents a systematic effort over time to liquidate a national population, usually a minority and functions as a fundamental policy to assure conformity and participation of citizenry. The institute exists to learn in depth about Genocide in details and how individuals can recognise patterns and frame policies to prevent genocide.

From the Press: Jonaraja Institute to establish Chair of Lal Ded on women emancipation

Documentary demystifying Laleshwari released

Jonaraja Institute to establish Chair of Laleshwari on women emancipation

Excelsior Correspondent



Dr Dilip Koul addressing a function at Jammu on Saturday.

JAMMU, Sept 23: The Jonaraja Institute of Genocide and Atrocities Studies today announced establishing of Laleshwari Chair in the Institute on women emancipation.

The announcement was made by the chairman of the, Institute Tito Ganjoo at a seminar organized by Abhinav Gupt chair of the institute on Laleshwari a great Shivyogni of Kashmir at K L Sehgal hall here. On the occasion a documentary on Demystifying Laleshwari was also shown to audience.

The seminar which was held on birth anniversary of Laleshwari was chaired by Prof R L Shant a renowned scholar while former MLC, Surinder Ambardar, Additional Advocate General, Monika Kohli, President Pir Panchal , Ramesh Hangloo and well known writer and poet Santosh Shah Nadan were guests of honour.

The introductory address was made by Vijay Wali a well known scholar who also managed the stage and dwelt at length on the spiritual journey of Lal Ded. He said Lalded besides a Shivyogni was a great mystic poet.

The welcome address was made by Dr Dilip Koul, Director of the Institute. In his thought provoking lecture, Dr Koul said the communities who faced genocide in the world have made a narrative of their own and said that the Kashmir Pandits who are also the victims of genocide should be allowed to tell their story to their children. He said the study on atrocities has been conceived by Tito Ganjoo the chairman of the Centre.

Dr R L Shant said that community which after its forced exile has started now gaining the self confidence and same can be found in the literature written in exile. He said that while Nund Rishi Chair was created in Kashmir University, the demand for creating the Laleshwari Chair has not been conceded till date though she was the great and first woman poet of Kashmir. He demanded that her chair be established in KU.

Surinder Ambardar who said civilizational onslaught led to cultural and religious genocide showed optimism that situation will change for better soon.

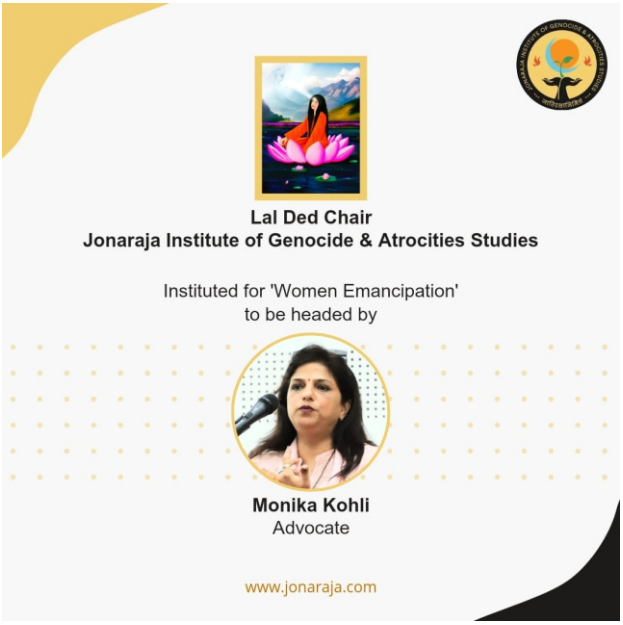
Ramesh Hangloo also stressed on creating of Laleshwari chair. He paid compliments to Government of India on installing Laleshwri's portrait in new Parliament building.

Monica Kohli said that though people tried to erase all the foot prints of the great scholars in Kashmir, but Laleshwari is still alive in every Kashmiri Pandit family. She is in their heart and soul, Kohli added.

Santiosh Nadan read a complete paper on the life and spiritual journey of Laleshwari and termed her an inspiration for the community.

The vote of thanks was proposed by Avtar Krishan Bhat while Pushkar Nath Raina also spoke on life of Laleshwari. Badri Nath Abilash a Bhakti poet read his a poem and Bhajan on Leleshwari. A portrait conceived by him on the Shivyogni was also unveiled on the occasion.

Another function in connection with Laleshwari Jayanti was held by Bhagawan Gopinath Ji Saatsnagh Mandli, Amar Colony, Gole Gujral in which portrait of Mata by famous painter, Ravi Dhar was unveiled by KP scholars and intellectuals.



Demystifying Lalded – A Movie review

Jonaraja Institute of Genocide and Atrocities Studies recently unveiled a documentary – Demystifying Lalded. On the occasion of Lalded's birth centenary, in a moving tribute to poet-patron of Kashmir valley, a documentary looking at Lalded with an entirely new lens was presented.

Demystifying Lal Ded is an exquisite cinematic masterpiece that delves deep into the life, teachings, and legacy of the enigmatic 14th-century mystic poet from Kashmir, Lal Ded. The film, directed by Sh Tito Ganju with profound sensitivity and insight, unravels the mystique surrounding this spiritual icon, inviting the audience on a mesmerizing journey through the annals of history.

The film's greatest strength lies in its meticulous storytelling. Through a combination of breathtaking cinematography by Nitin Dhar, soul-stirring music by legendary Prof. Kailash Mehra, and impeccable narration by Sh. Chand ji Dhar, Demystifying Lal Ded paints a vivid portrait of a woman whose wisdom transcended the constraints of her time. The narrative skillfully navigates the complex socio-cultural landscape of medieval Kashmir, providing viewers with a nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by Lal Ded as she defied societal norms and embraced a path of spiritual liberation.

The portrayal of Lal Ded's character is nothing short of sublime. The film captures the essence of her fearless spirit, her unwavering determination, and her deep reservoirs of compassion. The actress portraying Lal Ded delivers a performance that is both poignant and powerful, breathing life into the words of the iconic poet. The flora and fauna of Kashmir act as a supporting cast, adding layers of authenticity to the film's rich tapestry.

What sets Demystifying Lal Ded apart is its ability to bridge the gap between the historical and the contemporary. The film skillfully draws parallels between Lal Ded's struggles for spiritual freedom and the challenges faced by individuals in today's world. It establishes Lalded as a hero of resistance, an aspect of her personality that had been denied to her up until now. It highlights the relevance of her teachings in the present day, making a compelling case for the universality of her message of resistance.

The film's cinematography is a visual feast for the eyes. Each frame is carefully composed, capturing the ethereal beauty of Kashmir while mirroring the internal landscapes of the characters. The music, a sublime blend of traditional Kashmiri tunes and soul-stirring melodies, elevates the emotional quotient of the film, leaving a lasting impression on the audience. Prof Kailash Mehra is no stranger to anybody in the world of music. By lending her voice and craft to this documentary, Nightingale of Kashmir. Prof Mehra has added to the beauty and poignance of this documentary.

In addition to its artistic brilliance, Demystifying Lal Ded also excels in its scholarly approach. The depth of research done by Dr. Dilip Kaul and Sh. Tito Ganju is evident in the attention to historical detail and the nuanced exploration of Lal Ded's poetry. Scholars and enthusiasts alike will appreciate the film's commitment to authenticity and accuracy.

Demystifying Lal Ded is a cinematic gem that not only pays tribute to a remarkable historical figure but also transcends the boundaries of time and culture. It is a celebration of the human spirit's capacity for resilience, enlightenment, and transformation. This film is not merely a viewing experience; it is a soul-stirring odyssey that lingers in the heart and mind, urging viewers to contemplate the timeless wisdom of Lal Ded and the infinite possibilities of the human soul and its resistance Demystifying Lal Ded is a triumph of storytelling, a visual poem that leaves an indelible mark, and a testament to the enduring power of cinema to illuminate the depths of the human soul.

The documentary film- Demystifying Lalded will be soon released on various social media platforms. Please stay tuned to Pavak to find out the details of release.

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